

HELPING OTHERS WITH USEFUL SPEECH by Sarah

Notes taken during discussions with Khun Sujin, Bangkok 1979 and during the seminars in Sri Lanka, 1979 specifically in the context of explaining Dhamma to others.

'Better than a thousand utterances, better than a mere jumble of meaningless words, is one sensible phrase on hearing which one is pacified.'

Dhammapada, v.100

'Why does one speak?' Phra Dhammadhara reminded us in Sri Lanka to consider our speech more. 'One doesn't know it's possible to be sincere if one isn't oneself. If all one's nice speech is calculated and not kusala, why should one not think that the other's isn't calculated?' Khun Sujin reminded us that it takes time to 'study carefully what's what', to develop more understanding of the teachings and to help ourselves and others better.

Khun Sujin spoke on several occasions about the value of listening to others, in order to help. Sometimes we are so impatient that friends or family should hear what we know to be useful that we don't listen enough to their point of view. 'Listen to others in order to help, understand the other's 'complex' so that one will help and understand better. Listen, discuss the value of and know the right thing to help. 'One has to know what the other's understanding is and what is their 'weak spot'. 'Know, also, that it's harder to teach oneself than to teach the others.... We can tell everyone 'don't cling!'.... One tells the others, 'but what about oneself?'

On my last afternoon with Khun Sujin in Bangkok, she stressed how one has to know what the person does not understand yet and what does he understand wrongly, by letting that person speak. If he doesn't speak, we can ask questions but maybe he doesn't want to speak, so we should have more consideration. 'One has to know what the person is practising, whether he is developing understanding or just having a 'trance', not knowing anything at all.... So one can try one's best, but it depends on the immediate situation whether one thinks right or wrong, or proper or improper, or interesting or not interesting. We cannot set any rule, but one should not think that what one likes to hear the other likes. That's why the best thing is to let people speak because it shows their interest. If they are not interested in that topic, they don't have to ask.... It depends on one's answer to lead to whatever level of understanding for the question of the person who asks. That's why one must question, so one can know how much that person knows, otherwise one cannot give the right food or medicine.... One has to have patience, understanding that not everyone can understand nama, rupa, reality, seeing, hearing, visible object, sound..

Khun Sujin continues to say that 'sometimes people remember something, but it's not their own understanding. Question in order to help people understand whether it is his own understanding or memory or just what one gets from reading. One can ask that person to explain it and to say what does it really mean. Every Thai says 'I have citta' but what does he mean by it? Does it appear now? Can one tell what citta is, what the characteristic is now, what is it doing now, what does it mean now?' 'I like the others to join in and help explain and I really want to understand what they are saying. I don't like to pass without clearly and precisely understanding, because it can be wrong if you just guess at what the other means. It will be your own understanding of the others if you don't ask. For example, the person who says he has citta, - as long as he hasn't heard about the characteristic and function of citta, how can he know anything about what citta really is?'

We read in the Dhammapada (v.363) that:

'Sweet is the speech of the bhikkhu who has tamed his tongue, who speaks wisely, who is not puffed up, and who expounds the meaning of the text.'

Khun Sujin also explained many times how 'if there is not enough foundation for satipatthana, don't urge, because it will condition attachment to (a concept or) sati.' If there is not enough understanding, there will be the 'idea of self' who would like to try, struggle very hard. If there is not enough understanding, to develop more understanding and if he doesn't know the characteristic

of nāma or rūpa or sati and we say develop sati, what can he do?' She continues to say that this is the reason why she doesn't think that any talk will suit everyone, 'but when it's question and answer, anyone can hear the answer and different people answer differently, even though it's the same question, and the listener has the opportunity to consider whether he'd like to hear more on this point or the other point and one doesn't waste time at all, going straight to the point.'

Further, Khun Sujin reminded me how one cannot say anything unless the other person is interested and has accumulations to listen... 'Otherwise it's like trying to pull them back. One should understand the situation, because it's quite wrong to put the right thing in the wrong way when it's not time to consider anything yet. When one is asked, one can answer straight to be condition for future understanding, but one shouldn't expect sudden understanding. When one sees accumulations of lots of long wrong view, how can a few words bring understanding?'

The Buddha frequently encouraged his followers in the practice of right speech and helping others with useful speech at the right time. The wise monk (or lay person), we read in the Anguttara Nikāya (Book of Fives), 'speaks at the proper time, he speaks the truth, he speaks what is useful, he speaks about the doctrine, about the rules; at the proper time he will speak words that are worth remembering, well-grounded, purposeful and profitable.'

Khun Sujin continued to say that when it's not the right time to speak, 'the right words are not the right thing.... Understanding understands what is what. If that person doesn't come to ask, you shouldn't run after that person shouting questions and answers. One should know the right time. It's not breathing in, breathing out with satipatthāna for all the people in the world 24 hours a day. When you see the value, it's all right for you, but what about the others?' I'd received a letter in which someone had expressed concern that a close friend wasn't interested in satipatthāna. 'You cannot force or put it in. Crazy to do so. Just your own thing that you want the other to see it's not understanding at all, so it's all wrong. It's crazy. So they look on us like crazy people, crazy world, but when they don't want to listen and we don't speak, they don't think we are crazy because we keep quiet. Understand what is what, when is when and where is where.... Just consider how they dislike hearing it as much as we like hearing it.'

In the Dhammapada (v. 259) we are reminded that:

'One does not become versed in the Dhamma by speaking much; whosoever having heard the Dhamma, does not neglect it but realises it, he indeed, is versed in the Dhamma.'

In one of the discussions in Bangkok, questions were asked about speaking with kusala citta and the effects of the words on others. Later Khun Sujin told me that speech at the wrong time can be considered as wrong speech, and gave the example of not speaking to someone about generosity for whom generosity is very difficult. 'It doesn't mean that one should not, but the speech on generosity is wrong speech for those who have no accumulations for generosity, because they cannot follow it, they cannot appreciate it.' I mentioned that we might not know the other's accumulations and Khun Sujin said 'that's why one has to be wise and tactful, to speak anything to anyone. Try to find out first by this or that kind of speech, so one can continue or stop.' I asked whether with good intention, one could still say the speech was wrong. 'What one can say is that it's useless. The Thais have a saying like 'playing a violin for the buffalo.... very sweet music.... It can be without any useful result' and it can condition aversion...'

It seems that we mind so much about the others instead of developing more understanding of whether we speak or act with kusala citta now. The Buddha frequently reminded monks and lay people to consider the citta more, and we discussed the Rahūla Sutta with Phra Dhammakhano in Sri Lanka where Rahūla is advised to consider speech, bodily actions and mental states before, during and after the event.

In the discussion about helping a friend, Khun Sujin added: 'We cannot mind what people are doing. We can do our best, that's all. Be a good friend

to all, not just to this person. Or when that person still has wrong view, we can still be a good friend in one way or other. Consider is it useful or useless to speak? Is one asked to speak? I made a reply about learning to keep quiet and Khun Sujin replied: 'Keeping quiet, keeping quiet... Why do you speak like that? It's like you want to speak all the time... What for?' Khun Sujin also made a comment about how we often just speak about what we want to speak about. Maybe we speak about nāma and rūpa when the listeners haven't heard about nāma and rūpa. 'What about their interest? What about what they want to hear?'

In the Anguttara Nikāya (Gradual Sayings, Book of the Fives, 159, Udāyī), the Buddha expounds on the right way of teaching Dhamma:

'It is not easy, Ānanda, to teach Dhamma to others. For teaching Dhamma to others one should set up in oneself five standards for doing so. What five?

'I shall give a gradual discourse,' In that way should Dhamma be taught to others.

'I shall give a well-reasoned discourse; In that way should Dhamma be taught to others.

'Moved by sympathy shall I speak; In that way should Dhamma be taught to others.

'Not for the sake of worldly advantage shall I speak,' In that way should Dhamma be taught to others.

'Without alluding to myself or others shall I speak,' In that way should Dhamma be taught to others.

Truly, Ānanda, it is not easy to teach Dhamma to others. When doing it, one should set up in oneself these five standards.'

Khun Sujin also talked about the danger of attachment to language and words while listening or speaking about Dhamma. 'The purpose of language is to represent any meaning or reality so one just shouldn't be stuck by the beauty of grammar or language, but should understand what language is trying to represent. The beauty of language should be the truth of realities which language represents.' //

I asked if we couldn't say that beautiful speech is useful. 'What about the beautiful speech that doesn't represent any truth or the broken one which represents truth? If both represent truth, the beautiful one is better because one doesn't have to guess or comprehend by one's understanding. When it is right language it can represent more truth of reality and it's one's own language that one can be master of it and represent it deeply. In order to help the others better, one can speak better (not because one is attached to speaking better and to the beautiful words). Even monks can be attached to their way of giving a sermon as long as they have kilesa.... Understand that moment (of attachment) as it is. Akusala cannot be changed into kusala, but right understanding can see that akusala is akusala. That's the way to eliminate akusala.' I asked if one knew one was attached to one's voice or way of speaking, did it mean that one should stop. Khun Sujin replied: 'If one stops because one doesn't like the way one speaks, it's thinking of one's self. The speech can still be helpful to those who can get the meaning of it.'

Phra Dhammadharo reminded us that it's 'always good to teach people what brings happiness.... What about a campaign all your life to help others whenever you can?....' If mettā is strong enough one will be concerned to help. Cannot whatever happens in daily life be a subject for teaching Dhamma? Khun Sujin also reminded us that 'one is attached to oneself, to one's own feeling, when one cares what the other thinks.' In the end it really is a matter as Phra Dhammadharo pointed out of 'getting to know oneself better is the only way to really help others.... to have more mettā, karuṇā, more understanding, to have a more sincere inclination to other people because what has been most helpful to oneself will be most helpful to others also.... One understands oneself better.... '

We read that the speech that is well-spoken, blameless and above reproach is the speech that is 'timely, true, gentle, purposeful and spoken kind-heartedly.' We also read that the person who lives both for his own and others' benefit is the one who 'himself practises for the removal of lust, hatred and delusion, and also encourages others in that removal.'

During the discussions in Sri Lanka there were also many references to the value of being a 'nobody', not clinging to self, rather than a 'somebody', 'wholesome enough to be a good friend rather than wanting to be a teacher.' In Bangkok it was discussed how the Buddha was the 'best of all good friends', and how valuable it is when one 'considers oneself as a good friend without conceit'. In the 'Sutta Nipāta' ('On Friendship, vv. 253-257) it explains about the meaning of friendship:

'One who, overstepping and despising a sense of shame, says 'I am your friend,' but does not take upon himself any tasks he is capable of doing, is to be recognised as no friend. One who speaks amiably to his companions but whose actions do not conform to it, him the wise know for certain as a talker not a doer. He is no friend who, anticipating conflict, is always alert in looking out for weaknesses. But he on whom one can rely, like a child sleeping on its mother's breast, is truly a friend who cannot be parted from one by others.... '

The more concerned we are with the development of all kinds of kusala and the more understanding is developed the more we will know that this is also what is most valuable for others and the more concerned we will be to be a kalyana mitta or good friend and to help in the most helpful way with kusala cittas or skilful states of mind.

'Let him (the wise man) advise and exhort, and dissuade (others) from evil. Such a person is dear to the good; unpleasant to the wicked.'

Dhammapada, v.77